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ABSTRACT

Communication research long has noted how pretreatment strategies ("inoculations") induce resistance to persuasion, but a new model proposes that resistance is an integral part of the persuasion process. Using the inoculation framework, researchers showed the importance of threats to an individual's attitudes in developing resistance to persuasion and identified the mechanisms that increase motivation to resist. These mechanisms involve subvocalizing counterarguments, distractions that facilitate attitude change, the persuasive message's structure, and the persuasive speaker's intensity level. Other research has noted how violations of receiver expectations affect communicative behavior; but these findings are most often discussed as explanations for unexpected results. A new theoretical model suggests that resistance is best viewed as an extension of the persuasion process, allowing for the integration of threats, counterarguing, and violations of expectations in a propositional framework. This model has had convincing empirical support because it avoids relying solely on pretreatment message structures, making it more congruent with normal message reception conditions. (RI)

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RECEIVER EXPECTATIONS: TOWARD A NEW MODEL OF RESISTANCE TO PERSUASION

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RECEIVER EXPECTATIONS: TOWARD A NEW MODEL OF RESISTANCE TO PERSUASION

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Of the research on resistance to persuasion, perhaps the most consistently tested and supported hypotheses have been generated by McGuire's (1964, 1969) inoculation model. McGuire bases the framework of the model on a biological analogy:

> . . . the person is typically made resistant to some attacking virus by pre-exposure to a weakened dose of the virus. This mild dose stimulates his defenses so that he will be better able to overcome any massive viral attack to which he is later exposed . . . . (1964, p. 163)

McGuire suggests that analogous defensive techniques operate in persuasive situation. Thus the primary emphasis of inoculation research, and resistance to persuasion research in general, has centered on pre-exposing subjects to weakened forms of persuasive messages. This pre-exposure, or "inoculation," is operationalized through the use of refutational messages which both introduce and refute arguments against the subject's attitude that is to be made resistant.

A relatively large body of research had indicated that various pretreatment strategies are effective in inducing resistance to persuasion. However, Burgoon, Cohen, Miller and Montgomery (1978) have pointed out that this rather singular emphasis on inoculation theory and pretreatment message strategies has counterproductively restricted theory development in the area of resistance to persuasion. Rather than viewing the induction of resistance to persuasion as distinct from the

persuasion process, Miller and Burgoon (1973) suggest that the conferral of resistance to persuasion should be conceptualized as an extension of the persuasion process. Burgoon et al. (1978) indicate that such a conceptualization would allow for a better integration of findings in the persuasion literature with our present knowledge of the resistance to persuasion process, as well as allowing more conceptual specificity.

Threat, Counterarguing and Distraction

As indicated above, continued singular interest in testing hypotheses directly drawn from the inoculation model may be less than productive. However, the inoculation framework does advance several theoretical notions which may be of heuristic value. One of the more intriguing is the importance of threat to an individual's attitudes in the conferral of resistance to persuasion.

The inoculation model assumes that threat is a necessary antecedent to resistance to persuasion. It is presumed that any pretreatment designed to make an individual's attitude resistant to subsequent persuasive attacks must motivate the individual to defend that attitude. This motivation to defend is supplied by exposing the vulnerability of the attitude through the use of refutational pretreatments. Refutational pretreatments are assumed to be intrinsically threatening. However, supportive pretreatments (messages which further support or bolster the individual's existing attitudes) are assumed to be inherently nonthreatening. This leads to the inoculation model prediction that refutational defenses lead to greater resistance than do supportive defenses (McGuire, 1964).

Since the inoculation model assumes the relative ineffectiveness of supportive pretreatments is due to the lack of threat implied by the message, it follows that an extrinsic threat to the attitude combined with supportive information should increase the efficacy of the pretreatment. Research (McGuire and Papageorgis, 1962) has supported this reasoning.

Support for the importance of attitudinal threat has also been found in numerous other studies. Tannenbaum (1967) points out that one of the most impressive predictions of inoculation theory is that the refutation of one set of arguments against a belief or attitude generalizes to induce resistance to attack messages composed of novel arguments (McGuire, 1961; Papageorgis and McGuire, 1961). The support of this prediction is especially relevant to the assumed threat-motivation-resistance relationship since the alternative explanation that the superiority of the refutational pretreatment is a function of remembering the rebbutals of the arguments is ruled out. McGuire (1963) predicted and obtained results indicating that the addition of an extrinsic threat increased the resistance-inducing effectiveness of the pretreatments. Additionally, the effectiveness of the supportive strategy was enhanced more than that of the refutational strategies. In direct tests of the relationship between threat and resistance to persuasion, Burgoon et al. (1976) and Miller and Burgoon (1977) have found that threat is a predictor of resistance. Moreover, their results indicate a curvilinear relationship such that moderate threat leads to greater resistance than either low or high threat.

Taken together, the empirical evidence strongly supports the notion that threat to an individual's attitude leads to a motivation to defend

that attitude which, in turn, leads to increased resistance to persuasion. Of major theoretic importance, then, are the defense mechanisms through which the increase in motivation is manifested.

Festinger and Maccoby (1964) and Osterhouse and Brock (1970) have emphasized that when exposed to persuasive attacks, individuals actively subvocalize counterarguments against the position advocated. This subvocalization of counterarguments is presumed to create resistance to the persuasive information the individual is being exposed to. It seems reasonable, then that the effectiveness of the threat component of certain pretreatments is a function of increased counterarguing stimulated by the awareness that the individual's attitudes are vulnerable to attack.

The interest in counterarguing as a mediator of attitude change has led to lines of research focusing on the effects of inhibiting counterarguing, primarily through the presentation of some form of distraction concurrent with the persuasive attack message. Festinger and Maccoby (1964) hypothesized that since counterarguing creates resistance to persuasion, any form of distraction which interferes with that process will lead to increased acceptance of persuasive attempts. However, McGuire (1966) and others (Freedman and Sears, 1965; Haaland and Venkatesan, 1968) have pointed out that the hypothesis that distraction should lead to increased acceptance of counterattitudinal information is directly opposed to predictions derived from a learning theory approach. The learning theory approach suggests that distractions should interfere with the learning of the persuasive information. This failure to adequately learn the persuasive arguments should lead to an inhibition of the attitude change process.

Research concerned with these alternative theoretic explanations has produced mixed results. Festinger and Maccoby (1964) supported their hypothesis that distraction should facilitate attitude change. Viewing of a humorous, irrelevant film served as the distraction. Rosenblatt (1966) used irrelevant slides as a distraction and also found support for the distraction-increased acceptance hypothesis. Freedman and Sears' (1965) results indicated a trend in the direction of the distraction-increased acceptance hypothesis, but failed to reach statistical significance. Osterhouse and Brock (1970) report two studies, both indicating that counterargument production is inhibited and communication acceptance is enhanced by distraction.

However, other studies have found an inverse relationship between distraction and communication acceptance. Haaland and Venkatesen (1968) found that the use of both irrelevant film presentations and answering multiple choice and semantic differential items as distractors decreased attitude change. Vohs and Garrett (1968) also used two different types of distractions (operations upon geometric shapes and solving simple arithmetic problems) and found the inverse relationship between distraction and attitude change. Still other studies have failed to find any relationship between distraction and attitude change (Breitrose, 1966; Gradner, 1966).

Several other studies have investigated the interactive effects of distraction and other variables upon attitude change. Kiesler and Mathog (1968) found that the direct relationship between distraction and communication acceptance held only when the source of the communication was highly credible. They interpret this finding as being in keeping with the

distraction-increased acceptance hypothesis, reasoning that if the speaker is low on credibility the need to counterargue is diminished. The receiver can resist the persuasive message by simply derogating the source of the persuasive message.

Other research (Regan and Cheng, 1973) indicates that the structure of the persuasive attack message interacts with distraction. When presented with a complex message, subjects in distraction conditions changed their attitudes less than did nondistracted subjects. However, when the message was simple to comprehend, distracted subjects exhibited more attitude change than did nondistracted subjects.

Although a great deal of research has indicated that various types of distractions mediate attitude change in similar ways (see Baron, Baron and Miller, 1973, for a review), the type of distraction employed does seem to have an effect on the amount and direction of attitude change obtained. Zimbardo, Snyder, Thomas, Gold and Gurwitz (1970) found that "receiver set" mediated the effects of distraction. When subjects were instructed to attend primarily to distracting tasks, attitude change was decreased. However, when instructed to attend primarily to the message instead of the distraction, distraction increased attitude change. Using similar procedures and distraction tasks, these results were replicated by Insko, Turnbull and Yandell (1974).

In sum, it would seem there is little doubt that a subvocal counterarguing process mediates the attitude change process. Although the results from distraction studies have been mixed, Osterhouse and Brock (1970) and Baron, Baron and Miller (1973) have concluded that distraction during the presentation of an influence attempt increases the

persuasive impact of that message, unless the distraction is severe enough to interfere with the cognitive processes of comprehension and recall of the persuasive arguments. Thus it seems that the relationship between distraction and communication acceptance is curvilinear, a relationship incorporating and compatible with both the suppression of counterarguing hypothesis and with learning theory explanations.

However, it should be noted that none of the studies discussed above investigated the effects of distraction during an initial message on acceptance of subsequent persuasive messages on the same topic. Conversely, the traditional resistance to persuasion paradigm has been concerned with the effects of pretreatment messages on acceptance of subsequent persuasive attacks, but has virtually ignored the ability of individuals to adequately resist persuasive attacks through the subvocal generation of counterarguments. Indeed, while acknowledging the existence of the counterarguing process, most inoculation research seems to assume that without being provided certain types of information-oriented defenses against persuasive attempts the individual will change his/her attitudes in the direction advocated.

Threat and Violations of Expectations

Another line of research that has been somewhat overlooked in the traditional resistance to persuasion literature concerns violations of receiver expectations of communicative behavior. The majority of findings that are discussed in the literature have consisted of post hoc explanations for unexpected results in traditional persuasion studies (Burgoon, Jones and Stewart, 1974).

In one of the earliest systematic investigations of the effects of language intensity (the degree to which a source's language expresses deviation from neutrality toward a concept) on attitude change. Bowers (1963) predicted that highly intense language would produce more attitude change than language of low intensity. The results of the experiment, however, indicated a significant difference opposite the direction predicted. That is, low intensity messages produced more attitude change than did high intensity messages. One explanation for the results is that the highly loaded statements (comparing a type of educational system to prostitution, calling American women "deranged," etc.) constituted a very severe negative violation of the receivers' expectations of the communication behavior of the source. This violation may have led to a "boomerang" effect on attitude change.

Brooks and Scheidel (1968) unexpectedly found that an initially unfavorable evaluated source was evaluated more positively after he delivered a short prayer. Concern over whether this finding was generalizable, or simply an artifact of the research, led Brooks (1970) to conduct a more systematic investigation into the phenomenon. His results indicated that the phenomenon is indeed generalizable. Specifically, the research indicated that after exposure to a short message, sources who were previously evaluated unfavorably were evaluated more positively; and sources who were initially evaluated favorably were evaluated more negatively. Brooks advanced a post hoc explanation of the results concerning possible "contrast effects" which may have been produced by violations of receivers' expectations:

> . . . unfavorable (or favorable) speakers may be perceived more (or less) favorably not because their behavior is intrinsically persuasive (or dissuasive) but because it contrasts with stereotyped expectations which audiences hold for notorious (or popular) public figures. (1970, p. 155)

In a related study, Burgoon (1970) preceded the presentation of a moderate message on race relations with the introduction of a "name set." Although the message was not attributed to the name mentioned in the name set manipulation, it was predicted that response sets introduced through the evaluation of "militant" names would lead to the perception that the message was more militant than could response sets introduced through the evaluation of "non-militant" names. Contrary to the prediction, whites who were given the non-militant set judged the message to be more militant than did those who received the militant set. Burgoon (1970) suggested that since the white subjects reacted very unfavorably toward the militant names, the moderation of the subsequent message introduced a contrast effect. Burgoon also echoes Brooks (1970) by concluding that the reactions of individuals to speakers may often be a function of the speaker's communication behavior contrasting with stereotyped expectations.

One study has attempted to integrate the violations of expectations notion into the traditional inoculation paradigm. Burgoon and Chase (1973) reasoned that exposure to refutational pretreatments creates expectations about future messages which may be used in influence attempts. They suggested that the most effective refutational strategy would be one that matches the intensity of the persuasive attack message. This strategy would avoid the contrast effect that might lead to more attitude change when a highly intense pretreatment message is followed by a message of moderate or low intensity, and would also avoid the possibility of a low

intensity pretreatment failing to threaten the subjects enough to motivate them to defend their attitudes. Their results support this reasoning.

Although most of the above studies discussed their findings on a post hoc basis, Burgoon, Jones and Stewart (1974) have attempted to integrate the violation of expectations notion into a limited propositional framework.

In the first of two studies designed to test their "message-centered" theory, an interaction hypothesis was advanced such that female sources would be more effective utilizing low intensity language, while male sources would be least effective with low intensity language. Burgoon, Jones and Stewart (1974) assumed that the stereotype of females in American society involves such impressions as "submissive," "complimentary" and "domestic." It was reasoned that highly intense language would violate receivers' expectations of the communicative behavior of a female in a negative manner, thus leading to reduced attitude change.

The second study hypothesized that low credible speakers would be more persuasive using low intensity language, while high credible speakers would be more effective utilizing highly intense language. This hypothesis received partial support.

Taken together, the research discussed above strongly supports the notion that violations of receiver expectations are an important mediator of the attitude change process. In addition, the research of Burgoon and Chase (1973) has emphasized the importance of receiver expectations in the traditional resistance to persuasion paradigm.

A New Model of Resistance to Persuasion

As indicated above, most research on resistance to persuasion has maintained consistency with the inoculation approach and has dealt almost exclusively with the development of pretreatment message strategies designed to lessen the impact of a future persuasive message. Although the inoculation model has served a valuable and informative function, there is a limit to the heuristic capacity of any analogy. Indeed, it has been argued that the continued singular interest in the inoculation model has restricted rather than enhanced knowledge of the resistance to persuasion process (Burgoon, et al., 1978; Miller and Burgoon, 1979).

Burgoon et al. (1978) have begun the development of a new model of resistance to persuasion. While retaining the notion of attitudinal threat as an important variable, they reject many of the other tenants of the inoculation model. This new model suggests that resistance to persuasion is best viewed as an extension of the persuasion process. Conceptually, this type of approach allows for the integration of existing knowledge of persuasion with theorizing and research on resistance to persuasion.

Burgoon et al. (1978) suggest that the type of critical task persons are asked to perform, the presence of distractors and the amount of attitudinal threat in a situation interact to increase or decrease vulnerability to subsequent persuasive appeals. More specifically, they reason that when people are asked to critically evaluate attributes of a communicator, and are to look for negative source and/or delivery characteristics, they experience increased susceptability to subsequent persuasive attacks that advocate similar attitudinal positions. This increased vulnerability is due, first, to the evaluation of negative speaker characteristics which

inhibits the general effectiveness of the initial message and minimizes attitudinal threat to the receiver, thus leaving him/her unmotivated to counterargue in the future. Second, this attention to negative characteristics of the source distracts the person from counterarguing the essential points of the message, leaving the receiver unpracticed and unprepared to defend his/her attitudes in the future. Conversely, attention to positive communicator attributes enhances the general effectiveness of an initial message and increases threat by showing that one's attitudes are vulnerable to attack. This subsequent increase in motivation to counterargue should shift attitudes back toward the initial negative position after receipt of a second persuasive message arguing a similar position to the first persuasive attack. The results of the Burgoon, et al. (1978) investigation provide impressive support for these predictions.

Subsequently, Miller and Burgoon (1979) have attempted to formalize a propositional framework for the reasoning presented by Burgoon et al. (1978). In this process they point out and correct a logical and empirical omission of the initial work. The following propositions are presented:

> Proposition 1: Threat to an attitudinal position motivates people to counterargue against the position being advocated in a persuasive message, thus increasing resistance to persuasion.
>
> Proposition 2: People develop expectations about communication behaviors which affect communication acceptance.
>
> > Subproposition 2-A: Negative violations of expectations tend to inhibit communication acceptance of initial persuasive messages, thus retaining perceived threat and motivation to counterargue, leaving receiver more vulnerable to subsequent persuasive appeals.

Subproposition 2-B: Positive violations of expectations tend to enhance initial communication acceptance but this leads to the realization that privately held beliefs can be effectively attacked motivates people to counterargue, thus making them resistant to subsequent persuasive attacks.

Proposition 3: The kinds of critical tasks given people in any persuasive contexts mediates resistance to persuasion.

Subproposition 3-A: Positive critical tasks directed at either sources or messages enhance the effectiveness of initial persuasive messages but the realization that privately held beliefs can be effectively attacked motivates people to counterargue, thus making them resistant to subsequent persuasive messages.

Subproposition 3-B: Negative critical assignments directed at communicator or message characteristics inhibit the effectiveness of initial persuasive messages but little threat or motivation to counterargue is present in such contexts, leaving the receivers more vulnerable to subsequent persuasive appeals.

Analyzing the above framework, it is evident that Proposition 1 is a "holdover" from the inoculation approach. However, in the inoculation approach this assumption appears to be implicit and relatively peripheral to the model. In the current model the assumption that threat acts as a trigger to the counterargumentation process is a central and necessary component of the propositional framework. A great deal of research has provided empirical support for this reasoning (Burgoon et al., 1976; Burgoon et al., 1978; McGuire, 1961; McGuire, 1963; McGuire and Papageorgis, 1962; Miller and Burgoon, 1977; Miller and Burgoon, 1979; Papageorgis and McGuire, 1961). This proposition was initially developed by Burgoon et al. (1978) and presented in Miller and Burgoon (1979) as was Proposition 3.

While dealing primarily with Proposition 1 and Proposition 3, the rationale of Burgoon et al. (1978) implicitly incorporated notions of receiver expectations. They assumed that the expectations themselves

determined the amount of threat to a receiver. However, it is evident that an overriding factor is whether these expectations are confirmed or, if disconfirmed, what type of disconfirmation is involved.

The present framework maintains that when an individual is asked to evaluate the highly intense characteristics of a counterattitudinal message, and the message consists entirely of low intensity arguments, that the individual's expectations are violated in a positive manner. As indicated above this positive violation of expectations should lead to a contrast effect resulting in enhanced attitude change. However, the realization that counterattitudinal arguments can be advanced in a moderate and effective manner should threaten the individual and increase motivation to counterargue in the future. Thus exposure to a second persuasive message advocating the same attitudinal position should result in a reversal to the original negative position.

Similarly, when asked to evaluate the low intense statements of a counterattitudinal message and the message consists of highly intense statements, an individual's expectations are violated in a negative fashion. The distraction resulting from the negative violation should inhibit the counterargumentation process. However, in this type of situation the need to counterargue is reduced (Kiesler and Mathog, 1968), since the persuasive information can be resisted without the need to systematically counter each argument. This resistance without specific counterargumentation decreases the perceived attitudinal threat to an individual and reduces the motivation to counterargue in the future. This leads to increased susceptability to subsequent persuasive messages advocating the same

attitudinal position. This rationale has led to the development of Proposition 2 and the empirical work of Miller and Burgoon (1979).[1]

Empirical support for hypotheses derived from the propositional framework presented above have been rather convincing. Miller and Burgoon (1979) point out that none of the cognitive theories reviewed by Zajonc (1969) could explain the attitude reversals predicted and obtained by Burgoon et al. (1978) and Miller and Burgoon (1979). The counterintuitive nature of the predictions and the failure of inoculation, congruity, dissonance or attribution theory to account for the empirical findings make it difficult to reject the framework presented above.

At present, substantial progress has been made in the development of a new and expanded model of resistance to persuasion. However, much logical and empirical work needs to be done. For example, it is implied that unexpected moderation of language intensity on counterattitudinal topics threatens and motivates individuals to counterargue in the future, while unexpected intensification of counterattitudinal statements decreases the perceived need for future counterargumentation. However, J. Burgoon (Burgoon, 1976; Burgoon and Jones, 1976) suggests that (in the case of violations of receiver expectations of proxemic behavior) any slight variations from normative behavior may be perceived as positive, while more gross violations, regardless of directionality are seen as negative. This logic may well have applicability to the above framework. At present, however, the empirical problems of constructing persuasive messages differing only in slight but quantifiable intensity discrepancies prevent the testing of this logic.

Other dimensions of the model also warrant further research. The rationale of this model suggests that threat is an important variable because it serves as a trigger for counterargumentation. Thus knowledge of other factors which induce attitudinal threat would allow the scope of the model to be broadened (Miller, 1978). Similarly, other types of violations of receiver expectations need to be researched and applied to this model.

In summation, this model avoids problems associated with relying solely on pretreatment message structures as predictors of resistance to persuasion. Moreover, this approach is more isomorphic with sequential message reception conditions in which persuasion normally occurs.

1. In the original presentation of Miller and Burgoon, Subproposition 2-A and Subproposition 2-B read as follows:

> Subproposition 2-A: Negative violations of expectations tend to inhibit communicative acceptance.
>
> Subproposition 2-B: Positive violations of expectations tend to enhance communicative acceptance.

The modification of these theoretic statements in the present paper more clearly reflects the logic presented here and in the Miller and Burgoon (1979) work.

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